Rules of the Game
Using Magic Items (Part Four)
By Skip Williams

This week, we'll finish up our look at magic items with a discussion of item caster levels, magical auras, saving throws, and hit points. We'll also briefly touch on recharging magic items.

Magic Items and *Detect Magic*

Any magic item has a magical aura unless some other magical effect, such as *Nystul's magic aura,* masks it, or something suppresses the item's magic, such as a *dispel magic* spell or an *antimagic field*.

A magic item's aura depends on the school of magic involved in its creation or function, as noted on page 213 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide.* The aura's strength depends on its caster level, as noted in the *detect magic* spell description. A magic item's description contains an aura entry so you don't have to figure out the details yourself.

When a magic item has a use limit and has become nonfunctional because its use limit has been reached, the item still has a magical aura. When a magic item has charges and its charges are exhausted, it is no longer magical and has no magical aura (except for a dim aura that lingers for a short time after the last charge is expended).

Recharging Charged Items

Most charged items in the **D&D** game cannot be recharged, which is why some people complain that they can't find the recharging rules.

A handful of items can be used again once the spells stored in them have been expended, such as the *ring of spell storing* and the *ring of counterspells*, but these items aren't really charged, they're really long-term spell storage devices. A *ring of spell storing* or *ring of counterspells* still has a magical aura when it doesn't hold a spell (see the ring descriptions).

The game dispenses with rules for recharging items mostly as a matter of play balance. That's because most players expect that recharging something like a wand should be a little cheaper than making one from scratch. A *fireball* from a *wand of fireballs,* however*,* has the same impact on play no matter how many charges happen to be in the wand at the time or how many times the wand has been used before. Magic item costs in the **D&D** game reflect their game utility, not just the value of magic as commodity.

If you'd like to experiment with recharging, simply use the rules for making magic items. To determine the cost for recharging, just divide the full market price for the item by its maximum number of charges. For example, a *wand of fireballs* that has a caster level of 5th holds 50 charges and costs 11,250 gp. That means a single charge costs 225 gp. To recharge the wand, one needs access to a *fireball* spell and the Craft Wand feat. Adding a single charge costs 112 gp, 5 sp and 9 XP.

Adding charges takes a minimum of one day.

If you use this rule, assume that an item depleted of charges still has a dim magical aura (see the *detect magic* spell description) of the same school that the item had before being depleted. For example, a depleted *wand of fireballs* would have a dim aura of evocation.

Before trying out this strictly optional rule in your campaign, consider its impact on play. Under the game's published rules, charged items, particularly wands and staffs, are fairly rare because player characters have to spend quite a bit of money (or money and experience) to obtain a fully charged item. Even if the PCs are lucky enough to find a partly expended item, they must replace it with a fully charged item once its charges run out. If you allow recharging, player characters can keep their charged items "topped off" fairly cheaply and that makes them more powerful characters.

Magic Item Caster Levels

Any magic item has a caster level that was set when the item is created (see page 215 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). An item's caster level determines all the level-based variables that apply to any spell or spell-like effects that the item can produce, such as range and duration. An item caster level also determines the item's own saving throw bonuses (see the next section).

Magic staffs have fixed caster levels, just as other magic items do; however, a staff user can use her own caster level for spells she uses from the staff if her caster level is higher than the staff's. When a staff wielder uses her caster level for a spell from a staff, also apply any caster level increases that would apply to the user's spells. For example, a *staff of fire* has a caster level of 8. If a character who can cast spells as a 16th-level wizard uses the staff, she can trigger spell effects from the staff as a 16th-level caster. If that user also has the archmage's spell power ability (which increases caster level by +1), the character casts spells from the staff as a 17th-level caster, just as she would cast her own spells.

Damage to Magic Items

When a magic item is subjected to a magical attack, it can make a saving throw just as a creature can (though it is still just an object unless it is intelligent). A magic item's saving throw bonus equals 2 + one-half its caster level (round down). Use the same bonus for all the item's saves (Fortitude, Reflex, or Will). The only exceptions to this are intelligent magic items, which make Will saves based on their own Wisdom scores.

A magic item is "subjected" to a magical attack when it is unattended when the attack strikes (that is unless no creature holds or carries the item at the time of the attack), when the attack specifically targets the item, or when the wielder rolls a natural 1 on his save. This rule applies even when the wielder doesn't survive the attack.

Even if the wielder rolls a natural 1 on his save, only one exposed item is subjected to the attack (see page 177 in the *Player's Handbook*).

A magic item has basically the same hit points and an Armor Class as a nonmagical item of the same kind. Tables 9-8 through 9-12 in the *Player's Handbook* cover Armor Class and hit points for objects. A magic weapon, shield, or suit of armor gains +2 hardness and +10 hit points per point of enhancement bonus it has. (This doesn't quite match the text in the *Dungeon Master's Guide,* but the **D&D** FAQ and the errata for the *Dungeon Master's Guide* both contain corrections.) The item gains extra hardness and hit points only for its actual enhancement bonus, not for the effective enhancement bonus used to determine its price. For example, a *+2*

flaming longsword costs as much as *+3 longsword,* but it has only 4 points of extra hardness and 20 extra hit points.

Items that don't have enhancement bonuses don't gain any extra hardness or hit points. If you'd like to make magic items in your game a little more durable, consider giving magic rings, rods, staffs, wands, and wondrous items an extra point of hardness and an extra 5 hit points.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon* Magazine for 18 years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual.* When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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